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ABSTRACT

To be scientific, rural sociology must have a distirctive conceptual basis: therefore, defining "rural" has long been a major concern of rural sociologists. Recently faced with similar problems, political economists have revitalized the field of urban sociology by looking beyond the city to the social production of spatial forms under capitalism. This study applies a related critique to rural sociology, which has traditionally defined "rural" as cultural, ecological, or occupational. The two main explanations of rural culture are inadequate. "Gemeinschaft" is essentially non-capitalist and also not specifically rural; the same conceptual tools offered by the new urbanists can be used to analyze all types of contemporary communities. Human ecology reduces culture to an outgrowth of settlement patterns, thus obscuring the structure of social and economic relations. The current proposal for a comprehensive rural ecology identifies some definite objects of study, but its theories of space and society fail to consider underlying political-economic determinants. Two suggested constituents of rural are: "capitalist space" in the form of exploited, peripheral regions; and the "mode of primary production," distinguished by its unique, direct interaction with the natural environment. Rural sociologists are now beginning to treat agriculture, the other extractive industries, and regional underdevelopment as crucial elements in the larger capitalist social system. (Author/CM)

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# RURAL THEORY*

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Rural Theory


## Abstract

To be scientific, rural sociology must have a distinctive conceptual basis. From Galpin (1915) to the present theoretical crisis, defining the "rural" has been a major concern of rural sociologists. Urban sociology recently faced similar problems, and political economists revitalized the field by looking beyond the city to the social production of spatial forms under capitalism. I apply a related critique to rural sociology, which has traditionally seen rural as cultural, ecological, or occupational. The two main explanations of rural culture are inadequate. Gemeinschaft is essentially non-capitalist and also not specifically rural; the same conceptual tools offered by the new urbanists can be used to analyze all types of contemporary communities. Human ecology reduces culture to an outgrowth of settlement patterns, thus obscuring the structure of social and economic relations. The current proposal for a comprehensive rural ecology identifies some definite objects of study, but its theories of space and society fail to consider underlying political-economic determinants. I suggest in conclusion two constituents of rural: "capitalist space" in the form of exploited, peripheral regions; and the "mode of primary production," distinguished by its unique, direct interaction with the natural environment. Rural sociologists have always focused on farming but are now beginning to treat agriculture, the other extractive industries, and regional underdevelopment as crucial elements in the larger capitalist social system.

> The suggestion that there is some scientific justification for employing the title rural sociology may prove entertaining ... (Gillette, 1916:164).

## I. What is Rural ... Again?

The concept "rural" implies its complement, "urban." Together they constitute the complex unity of society viewed from a spatial angle. This conceptual separation of rural and urban can be purely expedient. The splitting of society in two may be justified by observing that, for whatever reasons, some researchers focus on cities while others look more to the countryside, the spatial totality being too much to grasp all at once. In this usage, rural is simply a "fuzzy, descriptive designation" (Bealer et al., 1965:257) or "convenient short-hand label" (Newby and Buttel, 1980:4) referring, for example, to areas of agricultural production and small population size. Few would object to this empirical, essentially arbitrary definition when used for institutional or administrative purposes. It is in this sense that Fuguitt (1963:260) speaks of the continued need for, and assurance of, "sociological research done in a rural setting." Rural sociology as a science, though, is something else.

In order to claim rural sociology as a legitimate "subdiscipline of general sociology," the former must have a "meaningful conceptual basis" unique unto itself (Fuguitt, 1963:260-61). A science requires a theoretically-specific and coherent object of investigation. The distinction between the empirical study of rural areas and scientific rural sociology is therefore crucial. To validate the field of rural sociology, a theory of rural society must be developed, presumably based on the meaning imputed to rural. Can this be done? That is to

ask, why divide the social world into rural and urban? What is the significance of spatial differentiation in modern society? What, in fine, is the meaning of "rural" in rural sociology?

Can such questions be answered, and a rural theory[1] produced? I believe so. Yet a satisfactory rural sociological theory has not come forth in the past. Rural sociology has historically offered several objects for study (Bealer et al., 1965): a type of cultural system, dispersed settlement patterns, and particular (extractive) occupations, all of which are sometimes said to coalesce into a distinctive "rural community." I shall critically review these specifications of rural and conclude that, as conventionally presented, they are insufficient to ground rural sociology. In closing, I suggest how two traditional focuses of the field might be reconceived in order to create an adequate rural theory.[2]

But first I would like to see what other rural sociologists have said about the issue. Charles Josiah Galpin, the father of rural sociology in the United States, apparently thought that neither culture nor ecology -- not even agriculture -- could undergird a specifically rural social theory. In his "critique of rural freedom," Galpin (1918:55-57) identified the "rural social problem" as restricted contact with people and ideas. Rather than to abstract out elements of this isolation and call them "rural culture," Galpin (1915; 1918:62-65, 88-100) developed a proposal intended to hasten its decline: the integration of farmstead and business center. Ecologically, this was based on his discovery that the rural community was best defined as a village trade center together with the agricultural hinterland which it served. To Galpin (1918:98) this service area practically constituted the structure of rural society. It was this "actual alliance" between town and country which undermined any exclusive focus on rural areas. Concerning agriculture, Galpin

(1918:19-24, 32-52) believed that the progressive transition from hoe-and-muscle farming to machine-and-mind farming would likely lead to the virtual loss of a distinctive rural character. "If science captures farming," he predicted, then a new rural psychology would emerge, similar to that of urban-industrial areas. Culturally, ecologically, and occupationally, then, Galpin and others questioned the validity of the rural.

Galpin (1915; 1918:62-65, 92-99) himself urged its immediate dissolution and replacement by a new orientation, aimed to overcome the problem; thus he developed the concept of "rurbanism" as opposed to "ruralism." Furthermore, Galpin et al. (1918:303) suggested that "rural" and "urban" were vague and contradictory and that their use should be discontinued for scientific work. Seeming to conclude the matter after over a decade of discussion, Bailey (1924: 162-64) wrote:

> The cardinal question may also be raised as to the continued legitimacy of the terms and categories 'urban' and 'rural'... Rural sociology has been advancing steadily toward a sense of the complexity, the relations, and the gradations of its field. Where the line should be drawn for urban and rural is very uncertain, and even whether it is really worth while drawing it at all as things are coming to be, is an open question.

We might pause to consider this paradox, that rural sociology was born doubting its object, its theoretical right to exist as a subdiscipline.

But these earliest thoughts of rural sociology were before Sorokin and Zimmerman. Their classic Principles of Rural-Urban Sociology (1929) made explicit what is involved in claiming a scientific rural field. The task: "to describe the relatively constant and universal traits or relations of the rural social world as distinct from the non-rural or urban social universe" (1929:8). The additional task: "'to explain' these differences or the specific traits of

rural social phenomena" within a functional or causal framework (1929:9). Now these are large demands. At the level of theory, we have to establish specifically rural causes of the phenomena. Otherwise there is no need for a rural sociology (1929:10, 57-58). Elsewhere Zimmerman (1929:254) pressed the point, arguing that the field, to be scientific, must concern the "mechanisms and effects of urbanization and ruralization upon a population"; any other focus approaches general sociology, thus making rural redundant.

It was on this alleged requirement for explanatory specificity that later rural sociologists foundered. Like the twenties, the late 1950s-early 1960s was another time for pondering the theoretical merits of the field. After surveying seven leading bases of rural sociology (social problems, community, social characteristics, the rural-urban continuum, Census definition, occupation of agriculture, and institutional), Hoffsommer (1960:176) concluded that a "scientifically meaningful separation into these two broad categories [rural and urban] is no longer feasible." Fuguitt (1963) addressed four major changes in rural life since 1920 (transportation and communication; trade, institutional, and social relationships; occupations; and population) and observed that rural and urban were becoming increasingly interdependent -- a situation that necessitated rethinking the conceptual basis of rural sociology. Finally, Bealer et al. (1965) identified three aspects of "rural" (ecological, cultural, and occupational), the problem being that they no longer interrelated as in times past. In regard to Sorokin and Zimmerman's call for theoretical specificity, how could there be rural explanations if sociologists weren't sure of what is rural in the first place? Again, rural sociology was found to be without an adequately-theorized object.

The current "crisis" of rural sociology poses this problem in a somewhat new manner. The dilemma has two related dimensions, social-political and

theoretical. Rural sociology has long been criticized for exhibiting a conservative, status quo orientation, stemming largely from its cozy relationship with the U.S. Department of Agriculture/land-grant college complex (Anderson, 1959: 364-67; Olson, 1964; Copp, 1972:520-26; Nolan and Galliher, 1973). Picou et al. (1978a:567-70) point out the practical-critical focus of early rural sociology, in contrast to what the field became. Friedland (1979) elaborates this theme. He states that, starting in the 1930s, rural sociology switched from its original concern with social problems to follow the dictates of USDA's "productionist influences." Friedland concludes that the political economic interests of the land-grant complex narrowed the scope of rural sociology until it no longer broached many critical questions about rural society. We don't have to agree with all of Friedland's points in order to recognize the substantial truth of his charges.

The conceptual crisis of rural sociology is indicated by several recent Rural Sociological Society Presidential addresses. They exemplify the persistent definitional problems of the rural in advanced industrial countries (Copp, 1972:516-19; Warner, 1974; Capener, 1975:398-99; Fliegel, 1976; Lowry, 1977). More theoretically, Falk and Pinkey (1978) stress that rural is not an empirical fact but an analytical concept, albeit a most confusing one. From a refreshing phenomenological angle, they criticize mainstream theory for its misdirected attempts to define rurality. This criticism is significantly extended by Picou et al. (1978a:570-75). Their thesis is that the rural sociological crisis is due to the field's "theoretical closure and methodological monism," i.e., a monopoly of structural-functional theory, survey methods, and quantitative analysis. They call for a "redefinition of rural sociology's subject matter" (Picou et al., 1978a:577; cf. the reaction by Bealer, 1978, with Picou et al., 1978b). Falk and Pinkey (1978:356) end on a pregnant query: "If there is no 'rural,' can there be a 'rural sociology'?"

Galjart (1973:254-55) blames the crisis on the "basic insufficiency of the sociological concepts with which rural phenomena have been apprehended." He also states the necessity of a "redefinition of the object of study." Along similar lines, Benvenuti et al. (1975:8-9) outline the character of the rural sociology that is in crisis: its ideological emphasis on "facts"; its "rank empiricism";[3] and its "positivism."[4] Newby (1978b:3-5) surveys the theoretical fragmentation and incoherence of the field, concluding:

> Rural sociology still shows little sign of overcoming its basic definitional problem -- namely, what constitutes the "rural" .... Moreover it seems unlikely that rural sociology can recover until this problem is resolved.

Finally, Shanin (1976:234) stresses that the fundamental issue for rural sociology, as for any science, is the "need for its existence, rooted in the theoretical analysis of its specificity, set in an historical context" (cf. Hoffsommer, 1960:175; Fuguitt, 1963:261).[5]

Most recently, Newby and Buttel (1980) relate the political and theoretical elements of the rural sociological crisis. They argue, on the latter dimension, that rural is essentially descriptive, an empirical term denoting a type of geographical space. Rural, they maintain, cannot be sociologically-defined. Since there is no necessary causal link between rural space and social life, the concept of rural cannot explain rural society (Newby and Buttel, 1980:4-8). Nevertheless, Newby and Buttel go on to give two requirements for a theory of rural society, that it: (1) be a part of a general social theory, and (2) include a sociological theory of space. Newby and Buttel thus make certain clarifications in rural theory.[6]

Having surveyed these various perspectives on rural, I shall next turn to a discussion of rural theory, treating those features that sociologists have put forth as definitive of rural. Before that, however, I want to mention how urban

sociology has dealt with its similar problem of definition, especially since that field has recently been revitalized by the theoretical effort. Briefly, Marxists and "Left" Weberians mounted a vigorous attack on conventional urban sociology. Geographer David Harvey (1973) in the U.S., British sociologist R. E. Pahl (1975), and French structuralist Manuel Castells (1976a, 1976b, 1977) led the charge. They generally conclude that the "urban" is an ideological construct, obscuring more than it reveals about explanations of modern society. (This should cause some alarm among rural sociologists: if there is no urban how can there be any rural?) Their two main targets are "urbanism" and human ecology. The alternative: to analyze the social production of spatial forms, such as cities, within the larger context of the political economy, that is to say, the capitalist mode of production. In particular, Castells (1976b:74), redirects urban sociology toward two traditional, but not specifically urban, issues in the field: the social organization of space and the processes of collective consumption under late capitalism.

With Newby (1978b:5), I think that rural sociology can glean a good deal from the reorientation of urban, in both its negative and its positive moments. Pickvance (1976a:6-8; cf. Bealer et al., 1965) says that "urban" has three different referents: a cultural pattern (way of life), a spatial form (city vs. country), and a structural form (e.g., metropolitan dominance and control). The critiques of mainstream urban studies deny the sociological validity of the first two, of dividing reality into rural and urban on either cultural or ecological grounds. Hence my two objects of analysis in this paper: rural culture ("ruralism") and rural (human) ecology. This leaves Pickvance's third definition -- the structural-economic -- to be treated in conclusion. In the following, then, I utilize the new urbanists' criticisms and draw from their positive program as well, where it seems relevant to rural sociology.

## II. Rural Culture

The idea of a "rural culture"[7] immediately raises two questions. Do cultural differences actually exist between rural and urban areas/populations? And, does a rural theory explain them? The empirical question must be answered affirmatively in order to proceed theoretically, which is my present orientation.[8] But the evidence on this point is highly inconclusive. Many studies suggest that there are no significant rural-urban cultural differences (e.g., Mogey, 1976; van Es and Brown, 1974; Pahl, 1966) at the same time that many others indicate the opposite (e.g., Miller and Crader, 1979; Lowe and Peck, 1974; Lupri, 1967). Some single studies present ambivalent findings (Hougland et al., 1979; Glenn and Hill, 1977; Willits et al., 1974). Yet rural sociologists spend much theoretical energy trying to account for (disputable) rural-urban differences. It is these explanations which I am concerned with. Assuming its existence, then, rural sociologists have historically been of two minds about rural culture. Some see it as essentially Gemeinschaft-like.[9] Others view it as Gesellschaft enough, but still divergent from urban culture.

The same year that Wirth's (1938) famous essay on the city set up a cultural contrast with "ruralism," Zimmerman (1938:80-110) pitted localistic gemeinschaftlich against cosmopolitan gesellschaftlich communities. In a related dicotomy, Redfield (1943, 1947) outlined his conception of "folk" as opposed to "urbanized" society. In one of the few explicitly theoretical textbooks in rural sociology, Loomis and Beegle culminated these formulations. Following Sorokin, their Rural Social Systems (1950:9-35, passim) presented rural society as relatively familistic, religious, traditional, etc. In a later work, Loomis and Beegle (1957:12-14) emphasized a theory of social change, from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft. These two books were extremely influential, as judged by their effect on subsequent rural texts (Nelson, 1969:122). Rural sociologists still employ the ruralism-

urbanism polarity in current research (e.g., Miller and Crader, 1979; Hougland et al., 1979).

Let's assume for a minute that the above description of rural culture is correct. Castells (1976a:38) writes that

> everything described by Wirth as "urbanism" is in fact the cultural expression of capitalist industrialization, the emergence of the market economy and the process of rationalization of modern society.

Now, if rural culture is gemeinschaftlich, and if capitalist society epitomizes Gesellschaft as Tönnies (1957:258) claimed, where does that leave the modern rural? In a confusing place, to say the least. Following Tönnies, Gemeinschaft is not so much spatial as societal; it is characteristic not of rural but of pre-industrial society. What we today label rural culture, the logic goes, would actually be non-capitalist. It is thus bound to decline with the progressive expansion of capitalist development. By adopting Tönnies framework, rural sociology backed itself into a conceptual dead-end (cf. Benvenuti et al., 1975:4-6). In contrast to the claim in the 1950s that modern society was urban society (hence urban sociology was sociology), rural society and culture, as Gemeinschaft, seemed difficult to locate. Rural sociology had apparently lost its object.[10] Indeed, any part of advanced societies to be conceptualized, even implicitly, as non-capitalist, would tend to decline in importance. But the point, of course, is that the conceptualization itself was faulty.

Criticisms of rural-urban as Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft are well-known. The problem lies in identifying a type of social relationship (e.g., group solidarity) with a particular spatial form (e.g., small village). Social relations don't vary uniformly across space. It may fairly well describe some country settlements, especially in the past, but gemeinschaftlich relations are also found in cities and rural Gesellschaft is likewise common (Bealer et al., 1965;

Pahl, 1966, 1967; Wakeley, 1967; Bell and Newby, 1972:44-46; Bernard, 1973:91-96; Wade, 1975; Wild, 1974; Saunders et al., 1978). Gusfield (1975:89) is especially concerned to refute the notion that the typology is an accurate theory of social change. Rural development, it turns out, does not lead toward the Chicagoan way of life. In any case, the Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft formulation fails to provide an explanation of rural culture.

Further, Benvenuti et al. (1975:4-7) blame misuse of Tönnies for many of the current theoretical ills of rural sociology. Once his ideal types were translated into the rural-urban continuum, "rural sociology became attached to a misconceived object of study." Thus the field was based on the passing historical coincidence of the occupation of farming and residence in the countryside. A close-knit local social system is a perfectly valid research focus, but is hardly sufficient for contemporary rural sociology (Saunders et al., 1978:57). Indeed, Pickvance (1976a:8; cf. Castells, 1976a:55-59) proposes the study of community as a proper successor to urban sociology.

Over the last two decades, the sociology of community has faced theoretical difficulties even more intense than has rural sociology. One response is to conceive of the contemporary community primarily as a site for reproducing the workforce, as a "residential unit of labour power" (Castells, 1976c:148). Occupying a central position in this perspective, the concept of collective consumption refers to the governmental management of services such as housing, education, and health care (Castells, 1976b:75-81; Harvey, 1973:270-82, 1976; Pickvance, 1976a:18-21). This approach has been used so far mainly in the analysis of cities, but there is no theoretical reason for this limitation; the urban Marxists' framework could apply as well to rural areas. Community sociology can thus be a unified study of the local reproduction of social life. The urbanists offer an alternative way of seeing communities, including relatively small ones.[11]

To sum up, the points of this section are two. First, the same conceptual tools can be used to approach contemporary residential settlements, whether rural or urban. There seems to be no distinctive rural community. Second, and most importantly, rural-as-Gemeinschaft is an invalid proposition. But rural sociology has another view of rural culture.

## III. Culture and Ecology

Many scholars reject Tönnies' typology, yet still hold to the sociological validity of rural-urban cultural differences. This is the position frequently taken by human ecologists. Ford (1978), for instance, in a useful summary, discusses "rural traditionalism."[12] From a simplified human ecological perspective, adaptations to different environments bring about different social forms. Thus, Ford (1978:4, 15) argues that rural-urban differences in culture persist because of dissimilar environments. Specifically, the ecological explanation is that relatively large, dense, and diverse population settlements produce a new urban culture (Wirth, 1938) whereas small, dispersed, and homogeneous populations maintain a traditional rural culture (Ford, 1978:8; cf. Miller and Crader, 1979). Is this an adequate view of culture? Do spatial patterns lead to particular cultural traits?

No. Settlement types do not in themselves produce specific forms of culture (Pahl, 1966:322, 1967:21; Bell and Newby, 1972:44-52; Burie, 1967:348; Wade, 1975; Benvenuti et al., 1975:4-7). Ecologists often posit size, density, and diversity as independent variables; spatial forms appear to possess absolute autonomy. In opposition to this view, I would argue that both ecological and cultural phenomena are intimately connected to a prior mechanism, the mode of production. Spatial variables operate only within the structure provided by a larger social system, in our case, capitalism (Castells, 1976a:37-40, 1976b:

66-69; Pickvance, 1974:211-16; Pahl, 1975; Harvey, 1973). The distinctive features of the political economy must be explicitly considered rather than assumed away. Only then can "dependent" and "independent" variables, culture and ecology, be properly analyzed. Cultural values, that is to say, are not explicable by ecological analysis alone.

This is not to deny that spatial forms may have relatively autonomous effects on culture (Pickvance, 1974:212-13; Castells, 1976a). Pahl (1966:299) and Benvenuti et al. (1975:5) go too far in saying that ecological variables are not sociological (cf. Bealer et al. 1965:260). Their claim conflates three separate issues: (1) whether a particular spatial form (e.g., a village settlement type) causes uniform effects such as "rural culture"; (2) whether spatial form per se can be properly treated as an independent sociological cause; (3) whether spatial form is sociological at all. Pahl and Benvenuti et al. answer all three questions negatively. Accepting, as I do, their response to (1) and (2) does not necessitate rejecting ecology as a part of sociology (Constandse, 1966). People do live some place (Bell and Newby, 1972:18). Ecological variables may have relatively independent effects -- if not peculiarly rural ones. The conclusion to be drawn here, though, concerning (1) above, is that human ecology has no satisfactory theory of rural culture.

## IV. Rural Ecology[13]

If the ecological view of culture cannot support rural sociology, can human ecology itself constitute rural theory? The field of human ecology began with Galpin's (1915) classic study. We saw earlier that he sought to locate the boundaries of the "rural community," ultimately defined as a village trade center and the surrounding farmsteads. In order to facilitate better understanding, leading to an improved rural life, Galpin (1915; 1918:62-65, 88-100)

developed the concept of "rurbanism." This was an important theoretical achievement, but, by virtue of its very formulation, was not distinctly rural. The first American rural sociologist thus denied the field's own conceptual specificity. Have things changed in rural ecology?

We are fortunate that Perez (1979) makes a good case for the "human ecology of rural areas." He not only summarizes some of the best rural sociological works of the past, but also proposes to synthesize them with several current trends, such as agricultural and environmental studies, in order to create a (nominally, at least) new field: rural ecology. Perez (1979:590-94) lists and discusses five "analytical components of the rural ecosystem": population density, settlement patterns, locality groups (neighborhoods and communities), man-land relations (discussed below), and the ecological processes (competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation).

Perez's (1979) comprehensive outline raises an issue that I have so far avoided: what do we mean, "ecology"? In sociology the term has referred to the study of two somewhat different processes of society: people's collective adaptation to the natural environment and their organization in space (Christiansen, 1978). Perez emphasizes the former definition; I have mostly used the latter, which can be seen as a subset of adaptation (Perez, 1979:591). To a significant extent, the two approaches have been historically if not logically distinct. The classic Chicago School of human ecology and much subsequent urban sociology tended to focus on spatial patterns, as did early rural sociology, which often included space as a part of "social organization." Some rural sociologists as well as the "new" human ecologists of the 1950s took the other tack. T. Lynn Smith, above all, dealt with social processes of rural environmental adaptation, usually under the rubric of "man-land relations," rechristened by Perez as "agricultural ecology." Perz urges this perspective, broadly con-

ceived to take in all the extractive industries and recreation, as the mainstay of his proposed field of study. Is this sophisticated version of human ecology compelling as a basis for rural sociology? Not quite.

Recall Newby and Buttel's (1980:4-5) two requisites of any theory of rural society. First, it must include a spatial theory. Human ecology certainly has one of those, but is it satisfactory? The new urbanists address this point. They criticize human ecology for exalting one particular type of social space -- the geographical patterns of capitalism -- into space as such. Ecology tends to assume, and thereby ignore, the specific needs of the capitalist system (e.g., private property, competitive markets, wage-labor). Ecological analysis also minimizes inequality and power relations. Hence the critique of human ecology as neo-classical economics writ in space, as ideological (Pahl, 1975:151, 237-39; Harvey, 1973:131-46; Castells, 1976a:41, 1976b:66-60; Bernard, 1973: 33-50).[14] These problems result in part from trying to treat urban forms per se, in isolation from the social-political economy. The human ecology of rural areas faces the same dangers of distorted vision.

This brings us to Newby and Buttel's (1980:4) other requirement of rural theory, that it be part of a societal theory. Again, human ecology appears at first to meet the test. Castells (1976b:72), for example, identifies the "ecological complex" (population, organization, environment, and technology) not as specifically urban at all but rather as a "veritable attempt at a general theory of society." Hoffsommer (1960), like Galpin before him, suggests the development of a single rural-urban ecology. But the shortcoming of the current proposal for "rural ecology" is just that: it isolates rural from the rest of society. It has long been realized, verbally if not in actual research practice, that the two cannot be thus separated. Consider the case of agriculture. Farming takes place mostly in rural areas, but it is only one important aspect

of modern agriculture, which also consists of input and output sectors (Goss et al., 1980:97). An analysis of U.S. agriculture must include crucial urban corporations in their relation to farms -- something that ecological concepts might find difficult. To view the human ecology of rural areas apart from the human ecology (not to say political economy) of the larger society is insufficient. Rural ecology, in short, does identify some rural objects all right, but they have to be reworked conceptually in order to form a foundation for rural sociology.

## V. Toward an Alternative Rural: Capitalist Space and the Mode of Primary Production

My criticisms are not meant to imply that there can be no rationale for rural sociology. Rather, in conclusion, I shall suggest an alternative approach to two traditional objects of the field (discussed above in terms of different theories): peripheral regions and the extractive industries (cf. Buttel and Newby, 1980). These, properly conceived, largely specify and determine what we call rural. They account for the distinctive qualities of rural life. But regional underdevelopment and primary production are not autonomous or self-determining, being themselves spatial effects of the division of labor in capitalist society. The constituents of rural, in other words, are defined by the dominant mode of production, which under the present system is urban- and industrial-centered. Historically, this ruralization, the subordination of the country to the city and its consequent specialization in the provision of raw materials, occurred as part of the process of capitalist development (Katznelson, 1979:215). Hence, to investigate modern rural society we must examine some peculiar features of that mode of production. I shall briefly elaborate these claims by extending a few of the new urbanists' points. Let's see what this perspective might hold for rural sociology.

Researchers may well concentrate on the relative autonomy, as well as the structural determinants, of socio-spatial organization. Such has been a major focus of recent urban studies: the sociology, or political economy, of space. The spatial itself is seen as a social category, not independent of, but integral to, a particular type of society. Pickvance (1974:214) sums up the view: "spatial forms contain the effects of the capitalist mode of production." In the contemporary world, space is an element of the capitalist system. This sociology, then, examines "how the economic base is spatially structured" (Pickvance, 1976a:8). For their part, rural economies are functionally integrated to serve the needs of urban centers. Cities and the countryside interact to maintain (and change) capitalism; together they make up capitalist space. Rural sociology focuses upon its chosen element of that socio-spatial totality.

Rural students are beginning to look at the relations of peripheral regions to industrial metropoles. The emerging study of uneven development within advanced capitalist societies stresses the extraction of primary products and the exploitation of human labor in that process. Based on a critical evaluation of Marxist approaches to international spatial inequality, principles of political economy are being applied to regional underdevelopment in the U.S. and Western Europe (Review of Radical Political Economics, 1978; Young and Newton, 1980; Buttel and Newby, 1980:22-25, 353-430). Such research holds the promise for a rural theory of space. It could complete at a macro, structural level what Galpin started on the micro, community plane.

But what essential feature characterizes contemporary rural spaces? If the new urbanists define urban chiefly as collective consumption (which, as suggested earlier, may also apply to all relatively concentrated settlements, regardless of urban or rural), what most specifies rural is a type of material production. Direct, daily interaction with the natural environment -- the

work of primary production -- best distinguishes the rural base. Social relations mediated by nature, then, can ground rural sociology as the study of extractive industries in modern industrial society. Let me label this emphasis, the capitalist mode of primary production.[15] Farming, fishing, logging, and mining take place overwhelmingly in rural areas. But, as indicated above, they are also intimately linked to urban corporations. To understand the changes, or lack of change, in extractive industries, we have to see them vis-a-vis the larger institutions of society. Both aspects of primary production -- on the land (or water) and in the boardroom -- must be highlighted in order to grasp the social processes and structures determining rural life.

Of course, there is little new in the suggestion to focus on primary production. Rural sociology practically arose as the study of farm people and their problems (e.g., Gillette, 1917; Galpin et al., 1918). Sorokin and Zimmerman (1929:57) cite agriculture as the most important of their nine constituents of rurality: "The first 'variable,' so to speak, carries the others with it." During the 1970s, the study of agriculture re-emerged as one of the dominant concerns of the field. Galjart (1973:258-60), Benvenuti et al. (1975:13-16), and Newby (1978b) all propose to reorient rural sociology toward land holding, land use, and natural resources in general. A major new textbook is organized around the changes in agriculture and their impacts on rural society (Rodefeld et al., 1978). Buttel and Newby (1980) identify five topics for a critical rural sociology, four of which directly regard agriculture (the fifth is regional inequality).

These recent works begin to uncover what is unique about modern capitalist agriculture. In contrast, rural sociologists have never dealt with mining to the same extent, and have apparently neglected logging and fishing even more (cf. Buttel and Flinn, 1977; Young and Newton, 1980). Yet in many rural areas,

especially the poorer, more underdeveloped ones, these latter industries frequently provide the economic backbone for communities and regions. One pressing need for all types of primary production is to determine where the existing political economic model is applicable (e.g., absentee mining companies interested almost solely in short-run profits) and where it must be supplemented with further empirical and theoretical work (e.g., the class position of "family farmers" -- see, e.g., Newby, 1978b; Singer and Hansen, 1979; Goss et al., 1980). Development of the concept of the capitalist mode of primary production may be helpful in this endeavor. Such tasks await rural sociologists in the creation of rural theory.

## Notes

[1]I am concerned with the concept of rural, not the word. We could as well agree to talk about larur sociology. Still, it is probably significant that the term "rural theory" is rarely used. The only place I ran across it was in Galpin's (1938:207) discussion of Pitirim Sorokin and Carl Taylor as "pioneers in rural theory." This scarcity of the label is in sharp contrast to the frequently used "urban theory."

[2]I should try to explicate my view of science and the role of theory. Philosophers of science disagree among themselves on what constitutes science. To think that the issue is settled would be to adopt an untenable position. We cannot ignore current debates in the analytic "philosophy of science" or in continental social theory. All approaches to science contain certain theoretical commitments which are challenged by others; there is no "innocent" rendition (see note 8 below).

The perspective that I employ here may be called a "realist" view of science. Although it shares several features with what is widely labeled "positivism," the realist approach differ s fundamentally in that it distinguishes between empirical description, technical prediction, and causal explanation. The chief goal of science is explanation. Empirical generalization, based on the observation of phenomena, is descriptive and possibly predictive but not explanatory. Explanation goes beyond the level of observation. It involves establishing the causal relations between phenomena by discovering the underlying structures and mechanisms at work. A scientific theory describes those structures and mechanisms which cause (explain) observable phenomena. Empirical generalization is thus important but insufficient. Causal explanation consists of discovering the regularities between phenomena as well as the mechanisms which links them (Keat and Urry, 1975:4-5, 30-32; Benton, 1977:67-70, 187-99).

This realist view of science is closely related to contemporary French structuralists and Marxists. The latter, though, often stress the distinction between theoretical object and real object (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 40-43, 87-90, 182-93, passim; Castells, 1976a, 1976b). I prefer the realist formulation of underlying structure and observable phenomena because it seems to preserve what is most useful in, while being considerably clearer than, the structuralist dicotomy. Castells (1976b:69) apparently has the same idea in mind: "The theoretical coherence of the process cannot be discovered by interrelating the elements which co-exist on the surface of reality, but only by establishing the relations between structural elements through which this surface is itself organized."

Realism does not exclude a concern with Habermas's (1971:301-17) types of science based on the human "cognitive interests" of mutual understanding (historical-hermeneutic, or interpretive, science) and emancipation (critical science). However, the realist view does focus on that other domain of knowledge which Habermas calls "empirical-analytic science." But realism differentiates between what Habermas lumps together as an orientation toward prediction and explanation. In rural sociology, see Busch (1978) and Falk and Pinkey (1978) for interpretive positions; and Kaufmann (1971), Nolan and Galliher (1973), Nolan et al. (1975:448-53) and Picou et al. (1978a:575-78, 1978b:603-06)

for statements of science as critique and liberation. In a significant sense, many of the earliest rural sociologists, "under the spell of reform ideology" (Nelson, 1969: ), were most interested in emancipation. In addition, of course, many rural sociologists agree that science is essentially theoretical rather than simply empirical (e.g., Bealer, 1966; Galjart, 1973:261; Benvenuti et al., 1975:9; Picou et al., 1978b:600-04; Zingraff and MacFarlane, 1978; contra Schnore, 1966:153).

[3]"There remains in rural sociology a touching faith in the belief that 'facts' of sociological research are 'things' which are self-evident (rather than taken-for-granted) and which can be grouped together to form theories" (Benvenuti et al., 1975:9; cf. Newby and Buttel, 1980:8).

[4]"The reliance on the survey method has led rural sociologists to be extremely suspicious of social forces that are neither tangible nor quantifiable" (Benvenuti et al., 1975:9; cf. Copp, 1972:523; Newby and Buttel, 1980: 3).

[5]Shanin (1976) chides Benvenuti et al. (1975) for ignoring Eastern Europe and the Third World in their analysis of rural sociology and rural society. I am guilty of the same omission, my discussion being limited to the advanced capitalist countries, primarily the U.S. Shanin also criticizes Benvenuti et al. for (1) neglecting Marxist work that bears on their topic and (2) implying that Tönnies - Redfield exhaust rural sociological theory. Rural sociologists have begun making up the former deficiency (e.g., Nolan et al., 1975:448-53; Buttel and Flinn, 1977; Busch, 1978; Newby, 1978a; Picou et al., 1978b:603-06; Singer and Hansen, 1979; Goss et al., 1980; Buttel and Newby, 1980). Picou et al. (1978a, 1978b) have emphasized the structural-functionalism in rural sociology. I intend this paper as a contribution to both the above-mentioned neglected areas in rural sociology.

[6]But they also present difficulties of their own. There would appear to be some inconsistency in denying the possibility of a sociological definition of rural while accepting the validity of rural sociology as a theory of rural society. If the first point is granted, what's left to theorize? Their efforts to the contrary notwithstanding, Newby and Buttel might be caught here in the empiricist trap of assuming that we can appropriate knowledge of reality directly, without the mediation of theoretical instruments. But with no prior conception of rural, how do we (1) distinguish it from urban, and, given that achievement, (2) decide which rural phenomena to study (i.e., which are really rural for scientific purposes)? As Newby and Buttel (1980:8) know, the mere cataloging of empirical differences between rural and urban does not justify rural sociology. We need some theoretical reason for initially conceptualizing society as rural and urban. Newby and Buttel agree with Sorokin and Zimmerman that, to be sociological, whatever is taken as rural must be causal, explanation being the aim of science. They diametrically oppose the earlier theorists, though, in holding that just such an ascription of causality cannot be made. In seeking to avoid Sorokin and Zimmerman's isolation of specifically rural causes, Newby and Buttel overreact by wanting to undercut any theoretical definition of rural. By so doing, they miss Fuguitt's (1963) distinction between empirical sociology in the countryside and scientific rural sociology. Newby and Buttel seem to offer the former as a justification for the latter, not recognizing the critical

difference between the two. For if rural truly cannot be defined sociologically, how can we claim a theoretical rural sociology?

The question remains, in 1980 as over a half-century ago, what is rural? Buttel and Newby have a good answer to this question, except that it is theoretically undeveloped. Definitions of rural are implicit in their selection of topics: agriculture and primary production, regional inequality and poverty. This is what they propose for rural sociology. Buttel and Newby analyze these objects of investigation in admirable fashion, but the theoretical grounds for choosing them should be made explict. I agree with their choices for the field, and at the end of this paper I attempt to show why.

[7]Culture here refers to a system of values, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. For our purposes, it is what we might call "ruralism as a way of life." Falk and Pinkey (1978:552) ask, "Is there 'ruralism as a way of life'?" I treat below the two main ways that rural sociologists have positively answered that question. Falk and Pinkey propose a third, the phenomenological. While the possibilities are exciting, there is hardly enough rural work in this vein to deal with here.

[8]The first question in such empirical research is theoretical: what is "rural"? That is, before any empirical work can be done, a prior theoretical solution, however tentative or implicit, must be given to the problem of the meaning of "rural." Castells (1976b:83) concludes: "In reality, one must beware of false protestations of sociological innocence. There is no such thing as a direct relationship between researcher and real object. All thought is more or less consciously shaped by a pre-existing theoretico-ideological field. To seek to avoid facing problems is to repeat ideas or even phrases without having understood their full implications. To deny the need for theoretical definition prior to any concrete research is to adopt a perspective which is narrowly empiricist and thus devoid of any scientific value." Or, as a rural sociologist puts it: " ... the most dangerous theorist is the one who says he has no theory" (Kaufmann, 1971:398).

[9]Benvenuti et al. (1975:4) state that Tönnies' Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft typology has historically been the dominant paradigm in rural sociology. Saunders et al. (1978:55; cf. Newby and Buttel, 1980:6) say that Tönnies influenced Galpin and other early rural community studies. Both claims are highly debatable, but the former would seem to be on somewhat firmer ground. Other than for an occational slip (e.g., Galpin, 1918:92, which argues that close business relations lead to a "real solidarity"), there appears to be little Gemeinschaft in Galpin, at least in his early work. See the exchange between Heberle, 1941, 1942; Brunner, 1942; and Redfield, 1943; Brunner, 1957:5-6, got the last word in.

[10]This was one reason for the "adolescent identity crisis" of U.S. rural sociology in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Capener, 1975:409; Lowry, 1977:463). Olson (1964:348) touches on this in discussing the "paradox of progress and the preservation of rural life."

[11]Katznelson (1979) and Harvey (1976) suggest what such a community study might entail. Following Marx and Weber, the former traces the qualitative changes that cities (read: towns and villages) have gone through since feudal times. Katznelson (1979:206) rejects Tönnies' distinction since the high medieval city was a "social whole precisely because its Gesellschaft relations were so intimately bound to those of Gemeinschaft." Production, exchange, and consumption occurred in the same location. With the gradual and uneven rise of capitalism, work and home became crucially separated; modern communities reflect this division in space. The contemporary community, however, is not experienced as a place for the reproduction of labor, but instead as the arena for three sets of everyday processes (Katznelson, 1979:229-37). (1) Consumption. If classes are determined by their relation to the means of production, consumption groups are defined by access to the market. These smaller groupings call for a more micro, community approach than does the underlying class structure. (2) Ties of Affect. But capitalist market exchange, even at the local level, is too impersonal to be the basis of those "social relations of feeling" which a community can provide. Working class culture and intermediate institutions may be seen in this light. (3) Political Linkages. Communities today are also political spaces. The State plays on ever-larger role in social affairs, and residential areas are often the scene of resulting conflicts.

Harvey (1976) specifies four ways that the State intervenes in communities on behalf of capital (cf. Katznelson, 1979:237): (1) the encouragement of (mortgaged) homeownership for some workers, thus fragmenting the laboring class and fortifying private property, (2) the provision of cheap housing, which lowers the cost of reproducing labor and hence of the wage rate, (3) the "rationalization" of consumption at home in order to increase capital accumulation, and (4) the socialization of labor and its relation to nature. This last point is of special interest to rural sociologists. Harvey (1976:284-90) maintains that nature becomes mystified under industrial capitalism. Early on, British Romantics and American Transcendentalists recognized this consequence of the factory system. The working class, too, responded by idealizing nature, reducing it to a "leisure time concept, as something to be 'consumed' in the course of restful recuperation from what was in fact a degrading relation to nature in the most fundamental of all human activities -- work" (Harvey, 1976: 288). Labor, then, trades an artificial relation to nature at home (consumption) for a dehumanizing relation to it at work (production) -- not a very attractive exchange but one required for the growth of capital. Wage-laborers, of course, did not passively accept the emergence of capitalism, nor, according to Marxists, do they agree to its dictates today. Harvey outlines three levels of worker consciousness (1976:290-95; cf. Katznelson, 1979:235): competitive individualism, thus verifying neo-classical economics and its offspring, human ecology; community action, collective but only local control; and class struggle against exploitation in working as well as living places. Which of these actually obtains is determined by specific historical events, and has to be studied empirically.

Instead of simply accepting these "urban findings" of Harvey and Katznelson, rural sociologists could study towns and villages to determine the general validity of the above propositions. To the extent that they apply, the objects of analysis will be capitalist, and not peculiarly rural, communities.

[12]The empirical issue here is particularly interesting. Are rural people relatively resistant to new ideas and behavior, as Ford (1978:8) says? Busch (1978:455) cites some recently adopted innovations in the U.S. such as mobile homes and citizen band radios. This might lead us to question Ford's generalization. Adoption of innovations, it would seem, depends on the social content of the changes, who's proposing them, etc. See Goss, 1979.

[13]This term, "rural ecology," is gaining widespread use. Perez's (1979) meaning, which I follow, is in line with traditional human ecology. Buttel and Newby (1980:17, 25, 431) employ the term somewhat differently. My comments are directed at their usage only insofar as it is limited to the human ecological perspective.

[14]This is the characteristic tendency of capitalist ideology: to regard one historical type of social organization -- namely, capitalism -- as natural, necessary and eternal.

[15]Marx's concept of the mode of production is not merely economic, much less technological. It is broadly social, including political, cultural, and ideological elements. In their early work, The German Ideology, Marx and Engels wrote:

> This mode of production must not be viewed simply as reproduction of the physical existence of individuals. Rather it is a definite form of their activity, a definite way of expressing their life, a definite mode of life (Marx, 1967:409).

Later, in the rough draft of Capital, Marx described the social nature of the mode of production:

> In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination [or pervasive light] which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether [or special atmosphere] which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it (Marx, 1973:107).

A mode of production reflects a specific way of social living. The capitalist mode of life pervades our society. Within it, I am arguing by use of the phrase, "the capitalist mode of primary production," there is a relatively significant difference between how most people live and work in rural areas dominated by extractive industries, and how people live and work in other sort of places.

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